

To Kill a Mockingbird

Theme

Race/Prejudice

1. How does the novel portray its African-American characters? Are there elements of racism in these portrayals?
2. How is the African-American community similar to the white community in Maycomb? How is it different? How might these similarities and differences affect how the two communities see each other?
3. How might Maycomb, and the events of the novel, be different if there were more than two races represented in the town?
4. Does the novel seem to think that racism will eventually be overcome? Or will there always be an element of racism in Maycomb?

Justice/Judgment

1. Does Tom Robinson receive a fair trial under the law? Why or why not? Would having an all-black jury have resulted in a different verdict?
2. According to the novel, is it ever justified to act outside the law in order to ensure justice? If so, when is it justified? If not, what do you do when the law allows injustice?
3. What's the novel's take on the American legal system? What are its strengths, and what are its weaknesses?

Innocence/Loss-of-Innocence

1. How does the novel think of children as different from adults? Are there any adults who have child-like perspectives? How about children with adult outlooks?
2. What difference does it make to the novel that it's narrated from a child's perspective? How would the book be different if an adult perspective was dominant?
3. According to the novel, what happens in the process of growing up? What factors determine what kind of adult a child becomes?
4. Is identity fixed in childhood, or can it change over time?

Morality and Ethics

1. What do individual characters in the novel base their ideas of right and wrong on?
2. How does the community work to enforce collective standards of morality? Where do those collective standards come from?
3. What moral principles does the novel suggest are desirable? Does anything in the novel undermine these moral principles? Are there times when the novel appears to be hypocritical?
4. Does Bob Ewell have bad morals or no morals? What's the difference?

Women and Femininity

1. Why does Scout take being called a girl as an insult? Would she have felt differently if she had an older sister instead of a brother? Why are there no other little girls in the novel?
2. What effect does not having a mother have on Jem and Scout? Is Calpurnia a female role model for Scout, or does Scout just see her as "black" rather than as a woman?
3. Why does being a lady require different skills than being a gentleman? Is there any overlap?

Compassion and Forgiveness

1. Is there anyone who the novel suggests isn't deserving of compassion and forgiveness? If so, who and why? If not, why not?
2. Lots of characters feel pity and compassion for other characters. What does the object of a character's compassion reveal about that character?
3. Is compassion learned or innate in the novel? Or both?
4. Why does Atticus refuse to pity Mayella?
5. Do you think Tom feels compassion for Mayella after she accuses him of rape? Why is it unforgivable for him to feel sorry for her in the first place?

Directions:

Consider the theme topics on the back of this sheet. The questions are there to help you determine what the author might be trying to tell you about the theme topic as well as help you remember examples of cause and effect.

Now, make a list of the causes of the theme topic (that you have been assigned) in the novel in column one. In column two, make a list of all the effects of this theme topic. Remember to look at specific events in the novel.

After you have completed both columns try to write a theme statement. Remember theme statements:

- assert a specific idea about a universal subject.
 - are based on plot but do not contain plot details (they are not specific to one text).
 - do not give advice (no "should" or "ought to").
- do not use 2nd person (no "you").
 - can be proven using details from the plot.
 - never start with a verb.
 - Are opinion based (can be debated).

Theme Topic: _____

Causes of the theme topic:	Effects of the theme topic:

Using the lists of causes and effects answer this question: What is the author trying to say about [theme topic]?

Finalized Theme Statement: